CLAIMS

1. A method of searching for data, the method comprising the steps of:

accepting a question from a client;

sending the question to a plurality of search services;

receiving a plurality of results from one or more of the search services, wherein each of the results has an associated rank that is assigned by the search service from which the result is received; and

adjusting the associated rank of at least one result based upon a weight for the search service that assigned the associated rank, wherein the weight is assigned by at least one of a client specification and a default weighting specification.

2. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of sending at least one user preference to the plurality of search services.

3. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of receiving a maximum rank possible from the search services, wherein the associated rank is relative to the maximum rank possible.

4. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of sending a subset of the results to the client, the subset being selected in dependence upon the associated ranks of the results after the adjusting step.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein the receiving step comprises storing the results in a result pool, and the method further comprises the step of retrieving the results from the result pool after a predetermined time.

6.   The method of claim 1, wherein the weight assigned by the client specification overrides the weight assigned by the default weighting specification.

7.   The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of receiving the question via at least one of the search services through an Application Program Interface.

8.   The method of claim 1, wherein the question is a natural language question.

9.   The method of claim 8, further comprising the step of sending a parsed representation of the natural language question to the search services.

10.   The method of claim 9, wherein the step of sending a parsed representation includes the sub-steps of:

generating grammatical information describing the natural language question; and

providing the grammatical information to at least one of the search services.

11.   A system of searching for data, the system comprising:

a parser for accepting a question from a client;

a dispatcher for sending the question to a plurality of search services;

a receiver for receiving a plurality of results from one or more of the search services, wherein each of the results has an associated rank that is assigned by the search service from which the result is received; and

a normalizer for adjusting the associated rank of at least one result based upon a weight for the search service that assigned the associated rank, wherein the weight is assigned by at least one of a client specification and a default weighting specification.

12.   The system of claim 11, further comprising a result generator for sending a subset of the results to the client, the subset being selected in dependence upon the associated ranks of the results after the adjusting by the normalizer.

13.   The system of claim 11, wherein the receiver further comprises a result pool for storing the results, and the normalizer further retrieves the results from the result pool after a predetermined time.

14.   The system of claim 11, wherein the weight is assigned by the client specification overrides the weight assigned by the default weighting specification.

15.   The system of claim 11, wherein question is a natural language question.

16. The system of claim 15,

wherein the parser further generates grammatical information describing the natural language question, and

the dispatcher provides the grammatical information to at least one of the search services.

17. A computer readable medium including computer instructions for searching for data, the computer instructions comprising instructions for:

accepting a question from a client;

sending the question to a plurality of search services;

receiving a plurality of results from one or more of the search services, wherein each of the results has an associated rank that is assigned by the search service from which the result is received; and

adjusting the associated rank of at least one result based upon a weight for the search service that assigned the associated rank, wherein the weight is assigned by at least one of a client specification and a default weighting specification.

18. The computer readable medium of claim 17, further comprising instructions for sending a subset of the results to the client, the subset being selected in dependence upon the associated ranks of the results after the adjusting.

19. The computer readable medium of claim 17, wherein the instructions for receiving comprises instructions for storing the results in a result pool and the computer readable medium further comprises instructions for retrieving the results from the result pool after a predetermined time.

20.   The computer readable medium of claim 17, wherein the weight assigned by the client specification overrides the weight assigned by the default weighting specification.

21.   The computer readable medium of claim 17, further comprising instructions for sending a parsed representation of the question to the search services.

22.   The computer readable medium of claim 21, wherein the instructions for sending a parsed representation include instructions for:

generating grammatical information describing the natural language question; and

providing the grammatical information to at least one of the search services.